

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07
NSAE-00 PA-02 USIA-15 PRS-01 SP-02 /050 W
-----190546Z 078385 /11

P R 190410Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7315
INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL MADRAS
CINCPAC

UNCLAS COLOMBO 1729

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, CE

SUBJ: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DISSOLVED; ELECTIONS SET FOR JULY21

REF: COLOMBO 0546 (NOTAL)

1. THE NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY OF SRI LANKA WAS DISSOLVED AS OF MIDNIGHT MAY 18. THE ACTION WAS TAKEN BY A PRESIDENTIAL PROCLAMATION ON ADVICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER. THE PROCLAMATION ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT NOMINATIONS WOULD BE RECEIVED ON JUNE 6 AND THAT ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD JULY 21. THE NEWLY-ELECTED NSA WILL CONVENE ON AUGUST 26. IN THE PRE-ELECTION PERIOD, THERE WILL BE A CARETAKER GOVERNMENT COMPOSED OF THE CABINET OF MINISTERS PRESIDED OVER BY PRIME MINISTER SIRIMAVO BANDARANAIAKE.

2. THE DISSOLVED NSA HAD ALREADY BEEN IN RECESS SINCE FEBRUARY 10 WHEN IT WAS PROROGUED BY THE PRIME MINISTER TO AVOID THE POLITICALLY EMBARRASSING PROSPECT OF SEVERAL NO-CONFIDENCE
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DEBATES AND A PUBLIC CROSSOVER TO THE OPPOSITION OF FOUR GOVERNMENT M.P.'S. THE PROROGATION WAS DUE TO EXPIRE AND THE NSA TO SIT MAY 19 AND 20 BEFORE THE BODY ENDED ITS CONSTITUTIONAL LIFE ON MAY 22. THOSE MEETINGS PROMISED TO BE AT LEAST AS ACrimonious AS THE FEBRUARY DEBATES WOULD HAVE BEEN. IN THE INTERIM THE COMMUNIST PARTY HAS RESIGNED FROM THE PRIME MINISTER'S RULING COALITION; THEIR MEMBERS ALONG WITH OTHER DE-

FECTORS HAD ANNOUNCED THEIR INTENTION OF MAKING EXPLANATORY STATEMENTS WHEN THE NSA RECONVENED. WITH THOSE STATEMENTS AND THE STILL-PENDING NO-CONFIDENCE MOTIONS TAKING PRECEDENCE, THE PRIME MINISTER'S TWO FINAL BILLS WOULD HAVE HAD LITTLE HOPE OF PASSAGE. WITH THE DISSOLUTION, THEY HAVE BEEN ABANDONED FOR NOW. ONE OF THE BILLS WOULD HAVE NATIONALIZED THREE OF THE SEVEN FOREIGN BANKS REPRESENTED HERE (INDIAN AND PAKISTANI BANKS WERE TO BE UNAFFECTED); THE OTHER WOULD HAVE LEGALLY ABOLISHED THE TRADITIONAL SYSTEM OF RAJAKARIYA (TEMPLE SERVICE) AND WOULD HAVE EFFECTIVELY STRIPPED BUDDHIST TEMPPLES OF THEIR AGRICULTURAL LAND.

3. DISSOLUTION PROMPTED COMMENTS FROM SEVERAL OPPOSITION LEADERS. UNITED NATIONAL PARTY HEAD J. R. JAYEWARDENE CONFIRMED PLANS TO CELEBRATE MAY 22 -- REPUBLIC DAY -- AS A DAY OF DELIVERANCE (FROM SEVEN YEARS OF SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY RULE). LEFTIST LEADER AND EX-MINISTER T. B. SUBASINGHE COMPLAINED THAT THE PM HAD SHOWN HER CONTEMPT FOR THE ASSEMBLY BY DISSOLVING IT THE DAY BEFORE IT WAS TO MEET AFTER ITS THREE-MONTH RECESS. TROTSKYITE M.P. (AND ALSO FORMER MINISTER) COLVIN DE SILVA WELCOMED THE P.M.'S DECISION (ADDING THAT SHE WOULD HAVE LIKED TO AVOID ELECTIONS IN HER "PRESENT PARLOUS POLITICAL PLIGHT") AND VOWED TO OVERTHROW BOTH SLFP AND UNP "REACTION." HE ADDED THAT THE DATES CHOSEN CLEARLY CARRY THE MARK OF ASTROLOGY AND POLITICS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CENTRAL LEGISLATURE, POLITICAL SITUATION, LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 19-May-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977COLOMB01729
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770178-0012
Format: TEL
From: COLOMBO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770540/aaaabipe.tel
Line Count: 88
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 4f425e90-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 COLOMBO 546
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 25-Jan-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2458515
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DISSOLVED; ELECTIONS SET FOR JULY21
TAGS: PINT, CE
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/4f425e90-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009